

Mafia boss Carlos Marcello in Dallas

by Earl Golz

Mafia boss Carlos Marcello didn't arrive big in Dallas until about 1950 after the local boys had almost eradicated each other in a series of gang wars.

Dallas' gambling, violence and vice until that time had taken no back seat to Marcello's life style in New Orleans.

Benny Binion since the early 1930's, when he opened a book-making establishment at Ross and Allen, had the fix in solid with Big D politicians. Binion's biggest headache was rival gangster Herbert Noble, who survived nine attempts on his life.

Binion, however, backed the wrong candidate for sheriff in 1946. The writing was on the wall and he said goodbye to Dallas for the budding casino world of Las Vegas.

No sooner had Steve Guthrie become sheriff in 1946 when he was offered a bribe to open up Dallas County to the Chicago mob. Openly seeking Dallas politicians and judges to pay off were Dominick (Butch) Blasi, bodyguard for Chicago Mafia chief Sam Giancana when Giancana was murdered in 1975, and old Al Capone henchmen Jake Greasy Thumb) Guzik and Charlie (Trigger Happy) Fischetti. Fischetti liked Dallas so much he bought an apartment building on Gaston street and invested in other property here.

A Jewish acquaintance of the Chicago Sicilians who also initiated here from the Windy City at the same time was Jack Lubenstein later known as Jack Ruby, the killer of Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963.

Marcello, busy building a slot machine network in Louisiana, was in no position to claim Dallas his in the 1940's. Chicago, at New Orleans, was making him pitch for this vibrantly rowing community along the Trinity River.

And Binion, who still had powerful Texas contacts through his good friend and Mafia leader Sam Maceo of Galveston, wasn't throwing in the towel, either. After his exile to Las Vegas in 1946 he tried to keep a long distance control over Dallas gambling and numbers rackets through a lieutenant he left behind, Harry Urban.

But Binion's old rival Noble was fast taking over. So Binion put a price on Noble's head and cal gang leader Hollis deLoisreen took him up on it. Open war broke out between the Green and Noble gangs.

Green got it first on Christmas Eve, 1949, as he left a nightclub at Fort Worth avenue several blocks down the road from where Clyde Barrow was buried. Green was hit broadside by a volley of shotgun blasts. Noble got his a year later when a land mine exploded under his cattle guard and turned his car into a twisted metal tomb on his road near

Grapevine.

One of the few members of the Green gang still living, Little Johnny Grissaffi, is now working with a Marcello-financed condominium project on South Padre Island near Port Isabel.

New sheriff changed Mafia/Dallas relationship

The Chicago Mafia's courtship of Dallas ended abruptly in 1947 when Sheriff Guthrie disclosed a series of bugged conversations about bribe offers he had received. The first man who had approached Guthrie was Paul Rowland Jones, a convicted opium smuggler and trustee of a Teamsters Union local. Jones, who got a three-year jail sentence for attempted bribery of Guthrie, was one of Jack Ruby's first friends when he came to Dallas in 1949.

Two years later organized crime's turmoil in Dallas reached its height when the city's own Mafioso-in-residence, Peter M. Duca, was shipped back to a Pennsylvania prison by the new sheriff here, Bill Decker. Duca was accused of ordering the execution of Houston restaurant owner Vincent Vellone. The Vellone incident resulted in his parole being revoked in connection with an old murder rap in the 1928 shooting in Pittsburgh of two mine officials.

Two days after entering the Pennsylvania prison, Duca dropped dead. He had lived in the 5400 block of Richard street in north Dallas.

With Duca's demise, the star shone brighter for Joseph Francis Civello, a soft-spoken Ross street merchant in the import wine and cheese business.

So did the star of Marcello, who knew Civello from rackets connections near Baton Rouge, La., before Civello moved to Dallas.

Civello had been waiting in the wings behind Duca and Binion but not without missing too much of the underworld action. He had served four years of a 15-year federal prison sentence arising from a heroin and cocaine bust in 1937 that reached from Dallas to New Orleans to Chicago.

One year later the federales nailed Marcello in New Orleans for selling 23 ounces of marijuana without paying taxes on it. He went to prison about the same time Civello did, and served less than two years.

1950 marks beginning of Marcello's rise in Dallas

But their time had come in 1950. Together they quietly cemented a Dallas-New Orleans relationship that today, six years after Civello's death, makes Marcello the man who calls the shots in Dallas.

Sheriff Decker presided a chief law enforcement officer in Dallas County during those formative years of the Marcello-Civello alliance. Decker's friends boasted he had his own 'Mafia' that would run an outsider from Dallas County before sunset if he were discovered to have syndicate ties. They remembered how he arrested Duca when he arrived by train from Galveston at Union Terminal and promptly turned him over to Pennsylvania lawmen in 1950.

Marcello, however, operated with more restraint than Duca or the Chicago mobsters. He was a Mafia gentleman and when he claimed Dallas, he did it with a minimum of bloodshed.

"He is of the school that tries to keep the heat off of him," said Aaron Kohn, director of the New Orleans Crime Commission. "He's been very smart. He's been the same way all through his executive history in the underworld. He used to be a violent thug himself. A street thug when he was younger, pistol whipping people and all that kind of business."

Marcello noted for effective use of bribes

Kohn noted that people "get shook up about murders but they don't get shook up about bribery."

Marcello invested heavily in Dallas area land and bankrolled bars, restaurants and other businesses. Vending machine operators paid him a percentage of their take and so did gamblers, although Marcello doesn't gamble himself.

Marcello has kept a low profile on paper, too. Nowhere in Dallas have authorities found his signature, although this is his turf.

Marcello's hold on the Dallas underworld, however, fell out in the open in 1957, much to his embarrassment and Civello's and Sheriff Decker's. That was the year when New York state police swooped in to make arrests of 60 Mafia leaders from across the country who were meeting secretly in the Apalachin, N.Y. home of hoodlum Joseph Barbera.

Civello was at the Apalachin conference and so was his cousin, Los Angeles mobster Frank De Simone. But Marcello, who was feeling the heat of government probes in New Orleans at the time, stayed home. Federal agents later came up with toll records which showed a number of telephone calls between Civello and Marcello's Jefferson Music Co. in New Orleans shortly after Civello returned from Apalachin. Telephone communications also were found under similar circumstances between Civello and John Ormento of New York, a major trafficker in narcotics.

Civello's name also came up ignominiously during a federal

investigation two days after Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, in the basement of the Dallas police station. Bobby Gene Moore, was said he played piano in Ruby's nightclub here and also worked by Civello's import shop at 3400 Ross Ave., was interviewed by the FBI on Nov. 26, 1963.

Moore told the federal agents that Ruby was a "frequent visitor and associate" of Civello after Ruby moved to Dallas. The FBI said Moore volunteered the information to refute a statement on a television interview after Ruby shot Oswald. A Ruby associate had said on TV that Ruby had no "gangster connections."

When Civello was convicted of perjury in connection with the Apalachin meeting, his power waned and the syndicate's book-making center at White Plains, N.Y., sent Pete Pelligrino to Dallas to assess the situation. Pelligrino's father, Rocco, a captain in the old Vito Genovese mob of New York, was a cousin to Dallas restaurant owner Joe Janni, believed by federal authorities to have been a major figure in organized gambling here before his death of a heart attack in 1973.

Civello's perjury conviction was overturned, however, and he continued atop the heap in Dallas until his death in 1970.

Civello's death and Janni's shortly afterward have left the city's rackets without an overlord for several years now.

Marcello comes to Dallas less often

Marcello, 66, is making fewer and fewer trips to Dallas, especially after a reported heart attack which was hushed up about a year ago.

Kohn disagrees with reports of Marcello's immobility.

"He is moving around so much that he has been protesting recently," Kohn said. "And as a matter of fact he went back into court recently and is still fighting to get removed the restriction on him—that is, the requirement that whenever he travels out of the state that he has to report to the U.S. Immigration Services."

"He's got his lawyers trying to get that requirement lifted. So it gives you some idea of the importance of his travels to him. He doesn't want to have to say where he's going."

But more and more Marcello is represented on goodwill trips by his son, Joseph C. Marcello, or brothers Joseph, Jr. and Vince. All three were believed to have shown up for the Dallas wedding two years ago of Carlo (Corky) Campisi. He is the son of Joe Campisi who runs the Egyptian Restaurant at 5610 E. Mockingbird Lane. Intelligence agents also say they spotted at least

three other Marcello family associates from Louisiana among the wedding guests. They were Alphonso Gagliano, Joseph Accardo and Luke Galliotto. Carlo Campisi's wife, by the way, petitioned for divorce three months after the wedding.

Joe Campisi and a gambler whose family owns a popular drive-in restaurant here were afforded an opportunity to talk business with Marcello several months ago when they visited the New Orleans area as participants in an Italian-American golf tournament, according to intelligence reports. With Marcello's reported heart problem, the tournament served as a convenience to keep up with contacts in the Mafia's most expansive kingdom of Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi.

Another Dallas businessman who knows Marcello on a first name basis is James Robert (Jack) Todd, former member of Green's gang and now in the oil business here. Todd last got out of prison after a jury found him guilty in 1954 of murder without malice in the pistol slaying of a patron at the Players Lounge, 1708 N. Carroll. In 1951 Todd was sentenced to one year in the federal penitentiary for carrying nitroglycerin and dynamite caps aboard a commercial aircraft.

Todd's son, Gerald, who had married into the Janni family, took over the operation of a restaurant shortly after it was opened with lots of fanfare in 1973 by a nephew of Joe Campisi, John D. Campisi. The restaurant at 6111 Greenville Ave., known as "J.D.'s," earlier had been closed by the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission as a result of an "affray" between Gerald Todd and John D. Campisi in which Campisi was wounded by gunshot.

Displeased with the way he was handling himself, a fraction of the mob reportedly set J.D. up for a police raid on his apartment with the tip that cocaine would be found. None was found but two sawed-off shotguns in the apartment were enough to send the younger Campisi away for six months in federal prison while things cooled off.

This internal feud and other signs of possible mob violence were viewed by some intelligence agents as a weakening of Marcello's hold in Dallas in his later years. About a year prior to the John D. Campisi incidents arsonists apparently set ablaze several nightclubs, including Players Lounge and the Painted Duck at 4729 Maple.

Tony Catherine supervises the syndicate's investment in the Dallas nightclub scene, but for the past three months has had to operate from a prison dormitory in Sargoville. He gets out on weekends, however, which is good for his business.

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The Godfather

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Caterine first ran afoul of the law on a credit card scheme, then got hooked on income tax evasion. He's serving 27 months.

Caterine had entrusted a man named Frank James Lamon with much of his confidential business until he learned recently that Lamon at one time was government undercover agent Ronald David Watkins. Watkins, who changed his name, once worked for the government in a federal investigation that cracked one of the biggest cocaine smuggling operations in the country.

"I have been looking for some bombings to take place on Greenville Avenue like they did on Samuels Boulevard several years ago," said a retired Dallas police officer whose specialty was organized crime. "Competition got a little too strong out there. But apparently they have made an effort to keep trouble down, despite that group from Las Vegas that spent almost \$100,000 to open that swinging bar on Northwest Highway.

"It would be my guess that he (Marcello) is still staying as legitimate as he can here. I haven't heard of any policy operations or any loan sharking going on to speak of. Right now his main goal is in legitimate circles—hotels, motels, a few car dealerships, taverns and distributorships of all kinds like coin machine operations that they put in these taverns."

Money to operate the legitimate businesses usually comes

from illegitimate sources, said the retired police officer, and much of it must be washed through a local bank or two. The banker who handles such deposits and the subsequent "fake loan deals" generally is on the take for about six per cent of the loan, he said.

New Orleans Crime Commission director Kohn noted that "there's been a long history of Marcello negotiations in connection with real estate in the Dallas area. He acquires land and properties, more often than not, in the names of straw men. He has a consistent pattern of that."

Marcello's brand of organized crime may be so well organized that it has lulled Dallas police authorities into thinking he isn't here.

In 1969 the head of the Dallas police bureau for vice, narcotics and intelligence said "the climate of Dallas is unsuccessful for organized crime—call it what you want to." Cap. W.P. Gannaway said prostitution, drugs and gambling were not too well organized in Dallas.

Gannaway said in 1969 that "you don't see prostitutes walking the streets of Dallas because we've made cases too many times."

He said Dallas had no main heroin contact and he challenged anyone to "walk down the street and try to place a bet."

Either Gannaway was too naive or Marcello hasn't slowed down as much in the past eight years as some people say he has. □